

# BETTERING THE BIRTH RATES

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EUGENICS as a science is still in its infancy. But conditions have rapidly developed in our age which make it imperative that eugenics shall develop into a mature and popularly understood science before it is too late. Otherwise irreparable losses threaten the human race.

May we not sit down together around the hearthstone of our minds and give a little serious thought to what the world may be in future centuries, when our children's remotest grandchildren shall be enacting their joys and sorrows on its stage? With only one of the three main divisions of eugenics are we concerned at this writing. We shall not discuss the hopeful efforts for the eradication of those diseases which taint the offspring, which after all is only a very secondary subject. Neither shall we refer to the Mendelian laws of heredity, showing how undesirable tendencies inherited from our forebears may largely be prevented from cropping out in offspring by suitable selection of a mate. Our thought shall be of that phase of the eugenic problem which regards mankind as part of the general process of evolution, whose laws as shown in the past we must study to determine the proper goal of future progress.

To the general principles of evolution, then, let us turn our thought for a few moments. Darwin's great service to science was not in fully explaining the processes by which evolution has come about (for that he did not do), but in convincing a hitherto incredulous world of the fact that evolution is the true story of creation; that men and animals and plants alike are differentiated descendants from an original very simple stock of life that was measurably the same for all. He convinced the world of this great truth

through his plausible explanation of the origin of species through what he styled "natural selection," or as otherwise termed, "the survival of the fittest." In announcing this principle Darwin was a pioneer, and was no more able than any other pioneer of science to discern the whole truth from the very start. His principle of the survival of the fittest may indeed be expanded and liberalized to cover the whole sublime truth that those types finally tend to prevail which are most in harmony with the basic laws of the universe; but in the hands of some earlier and narrower teachers too often "survival of the fittest" was interpreted to mean nothing deeper than the survival of the "fightingest." No wonder theologians and moral teachers stood aghast. And no wonder the nation which accepted that dangerous partial view of the law of life's "kultur" plunged itself and well nigh the world into retrogression and failure.

The genuine men of science at present accept the view that nature's decision as to which families of living creatures shall survive and which shall fall by the way depends upon factors very complex and yet imperfectly understood. Beyond doubt the strong, the swift, the hardy, the courageous, the prudent, the camouflaged, have a certain advantage in the quest for perpetuity over the weak, the slow, the delicate, the cowardly, the rash, and the conspicuous, yet many other factors and laws are at work in the great drama of creation, which we can arrive at only little by little and by patient study. Besides "natural selection," Darwin himself in later years wrote very convincingly about what he termed "sexual selection," and subsequent writers have spoken of still other factors in the problem. Especially did

Henry Drummond render a service by emphasizing the influence of altruism in the evolutionary process, showing that along with the struggle for the life of self there has been an equally important "struggle for the life of others." He might well have summed up his contribution to the problem by coining such a phrase as "the survival of the best loved."

To put in other words the somewhat difficult thought we are feeling after, the course of evolution is not entirely the adaptation of the creature to its *external environment*; in part it is the adaptation of the creature to its *internal environment*—to an invisible background of patterns and purposes which are a part of its animal inheritance. Every bird and beast and tree has grown from primitive ancestral forms to be what it is today not merely through a vague struggle for some form of continued life, but through a struggle to live *its own* kind of life in its own way.

We are now ready to approach the question as to the kind of future development toward which it is proper for human society to aspire, because of patterns already outlined in the basic needs of our nature. What sort of a world may we hope that this may be five hundred, five thousand, or fifty thousand years from now? That is a sane and conservative question, for the periods named are short in comparison with the whole past history of the human family. The answer is that the development must proceed between now and then in harmony with the great principles of evolution in general, and in particular the higher laws to which we have been referring. Let us apply these, each in its turn.

We began by recognizing both egoism and altruism as factors in evolution. Now altruism, or regard for the life of others, referred in its most primitive appearance to the care of a parent for eggs or living offspring. Following this was the stage where affection arose between mate and mate. Next, in certain specially ethical spe-

cies, there developed a flock loyalty, seen in some birds and same herds of mammals, notably wild pigs and certain monkeys. In most human beings, when not inflamed by the baser passions, there is some degree of the still higher stage where there is care for any member of our own species, a willingness to risk self in rescuing even a stranger from imminent peril. And rounding out this cloak of nobility like a fringe are such beautiful minor manifestations even outside one's own species as the love of a man for his dog, with kindness for the humbler world in general.

So we come to see that altruism, after all, is not so much the opposite of egoism as its ennoblement through expansion to its logical limits. By sympathy and appreciation we come to include within the limits of ourselves what at first seemed outside of ourselves and even hostile to us. So we recognize at last that we personally, no less than nature in the large, fundamentally love all the many and various manifestations of life—even the harsher and coarser and uglier, so long as they are "*kept in their place*,"—since without them as a part of the environment our own narrower lives cannot be made perfect. It is only under the superior urge of danger to our own existence that we fight against any other life. Curb the danger, and our former foes become objects first of toleration, then of curious interest, then of appreciation, and finally of love.

Now I think we are ready for one more and final step in our speculation—all of which, be it remembered, is in preparation for a rational program of eugenics. May it not be a prerogative of man that he shall not merely illustrate evolution but improve upon it, building upon the old foundation but adding higher stories of his own? For man's rational self-control makes possible a course of action by which to those forms which are interesting, indeed, yet deadly or primitive, he may assign their "due place" by consigning

them not to the *past*, but to a position of *extreme minority*.

As regards ability, our population is made up of geniuses, talented people, ordinary people, stupid people, and fools. Surely we all hope that five hundred years from now the percentage of highly gifted people will be greater than now—such is the path of progress—and the ratio of stupid people and fools much diminished. But is it necessary to hope that the breed of stupid people and fools shall become wholly unknown? Some of us will vote in the negative. If defective and stupid people today find life worth living, a few stupid posterity of these same people may find life worth living a thousand years from now; and then as now they may serve a function in the complex body of humanity. In similar terms we may speak of the weak and the strong, the plain-looking and the beautiful, the erratic and the perfectly balanced, the backward or imitative races and the races gifted with leadership. It is harder to say this of the immorally elemental as against the morally disciplined, yet perhaps in time our largeness of heart and broadening viewpoint may even in this bring us into likeness with the divine mystery of nature which sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust, and giveth sweet sleep to the guttersnipe and the saint.

One can easily see what path the race must follow if this picture of an improved yet interestingly varied future is to become an actuality. *All* normal and interesting types, even the rougher and more primitive, must be allowed to propagate themselves, but the more rapid propagation, with the more numerous offspring, must be steadily practiced by the types which are interesting on the higher and nobler planes—the beautiful more than the ugly, the gentle more than the turbulent, the disciplined more than the rudely elemental, the vigorous more than the weak, the talented more than the stupid. We have said it is man's prerogative not only to illustrate evolution but to improve upon its earlier methods.

If we may dare to use the word "purpose" in connection with results achieved through the evolutionary past, then we shall say that when the purpose was to cleanse the American continent of its terrible fauna of tyrannosaurs and triceratops in order to make room for deer and bison and black bears, with their higher intelligence and higher capacity for affection, those many races of dinosaurs were swept into extinction. The result could hardly have been reached with any half-way measures, for those great creatures, guided only by natural passion, tended to breed and multiply without limit, and even a small remnant of tyrannosaurs might have staged a "come-back" and again overspread the continent, to the ruin of the new and higher types. Man alone has conceived and started to execute the idea of regulating the rate of propagation of different living types to suit the present needs of the dominant and higher interests of society. If, for example, the country needs five million horses there will be five million horses on hand to meet the need, but there is no danger of there accidentally being fifty million.

Man has progressed a long way in applying the sound supply-and-demand principle to the animals under his control in domestication, but he has not even started to apply it to his own species. Up until now this backwardness has probably been fortunate, for in the past states of human ignorance and of the tyranny of the strong over the lowly any eugenic experiments of man upon man would have ended in disaster to the better interests of the race. Those of us who have read that fantastic and fearful novel, *The Messiah of the Cylinder*, shuddered, I am sure, at the picture of how in the future such experiments might end in tyranny, cold intellect, superficial and sensual beauty, and a narrow-minded insistence upon uniformity in non-essentials. And the cruelest thing of all in the picture was the systematic denial of the common blessings of wedlock and parenthood to the multitudes

who by arbitrary and technical standards were classed as "defectives."

Yet in spite of the risk that mankind may bungle its job when it undertakes it, we are compelled to recognize that the social regulation of fecundity, with a view to stocking the future with the right grade of human beings, is a thing which cannot much longer be postponed lest it be forever too late. Present-day conditions in the most enlightened nations have brought on a crisis. For in our generation the finest blood of the most gifted peoples, instead of gaining ground, as it must if progress is to continue, is losing ground at an alarming rate.

In our mind's eye let us have standing before us all citizens of the United States between the fruitful ages of 25 and 45. Let us go through them and classify them as to their native intelligence, their native capacity for culture, their general position as high or low in the scale of human endowments. Let us pick out the one-tenth who are noblest, most gifted, most full of promise for making the future world a society filled with persons of finer intelligence and culture than is the world of today. In our mind's eye let us set this best one-tenth apart from the less gifted nine-tenths and let us ask them what the choice blood in their veins is going to be doing in the world of a thousand years hence. Let us suppose, for convenience, that this best flower of all past evolution consists, so far as our country is concerned, of a million men and a million women, two million altogether. If the present rate of "increase" continues, how many children of these two million are there going to be in the next generation? Probably less than fourteen hundred thousand, owing to the numbers who will not marry and the growing popularity, among the married, of the childless home or the home with only one child. But let us give hope the benefit of the doubt and say fourteen hundred thousand, which implies an average for every adult man and woman of one and

four-tenths offspring, in addition to any who may die before maturity.

At the same rate, with the same suicidal tendencies unchecked, how many grandchildren will there finally be from the present two million of America's best young blood? Only one million. How many grandchildren's grandchildren a hundred and fifty years hence? Only half a million. How many posterity four hundred years hence, assuming for clarity the continuance in like degree of the present tendency on the part of the best to dwindle out through lack of offspring? Less than seventy thousand! And if we continued to the limit of a thousand years with this *reductio ad desperandum*, we should have the present two million best of America's maturing generation represented in that later world by a posterity of less than five hundred souls!

From this point on we may be treading on dangerous ground, but we must bring out clearly that necessary principle for the future organization of society to which all the foregoing has been leading us up. What the kingdom of heaven upon earth implies we have already tried to discover, through studying the way the forces of the universe have worked in creation hitherto. And we found it to include such a conscious control by mankind of its own destinies that the gentler, stronger and more finely gifted elements of society shall be ever on the increase, yet without trampling on the individual right to happiness of any member of the race, however primitive, lowly or perverted, and without robbing the world of that sweet and necessary variety and multiplicity of endowments which accords with the Divine purpose in creating both man and all creeping things and in pronouncing them all as very good.

Partly, of course, the improvement which the world desires will come through improved education and improved sanitary methods, along with improved social standards in certain familiar matters of conduct. But that is not all, for it is eternally true that

"blood will tell." Let us picture the society of late future centuries as organized along the lines which these thoughts suggest. Eugenics shall have ceased to be an affair for academic discussion. By law and social custom, backed by universal public opinion, it shall have taken its place as arbiter of the race's future.

Suppose the wisdom of society as a whole shall say to any young married couple: "You have been measured and tested, not merely on the basis of your individual performances but by the more important standard of the performances of the ancestors whose blood is flowing in your veins. You are found to be of that fine minority who are highest in health and mental vigor, in sweet reasonableness of disposition and general promise along noble lines. For the blessing of the world the next generation must contain a larger percentage with blood such as yours is than the present generation contains. Where two parents such as you are shall unite to form a home, there must emerge *more than two* children to form an increased part of the coming world. This is your assigned and positive duty to society, your soldierhood to the great human commonwealth. You will not even desire to be slackers in this warfare against the insidious forces which would thwart the divine purposes of evolution."

Then let us suppose that the wisdom of society as a whole shall say to another young man and woman: "You also have been measured and tested, but you are found to be of that scantily gifted group who stand lowest in mentality, or in physical constitution, or in disposition to control passion and to give service to others and in general to forward the noblest interests of the race. For the blessing of the world the next generation must contain a smaller percentage with blood such as yours than the present generation contains. Wherever two people such as you are shall unite to form a home there must never emerge more than two children to demand room in the

coming generation. If only one child comes into the world to bless your union it is just as well; no hint of opprobrium shall rest upon you for modestly accepting such a smaller share in the continuance of society. If your inclination leads you to refrain from marriage altogether, or in marriage to forego the blessing of offspring, you will not be called slackers. Nevertheless, remember, society recognizes you as human beings with rights to happiness no less than your superiors. Even though you be a cripple or a weakling, an unbalanced neurotic or a back alley incompetent, society does not propose to extinguish you by arbitrary force. The world of which you are a part recognizes that perhaps you are the very ones to whom a mate and a little home and a smile from the cradle will mean everything, your one ewe lamb of comfort in an otherwise cramped or broken life. No opprobrium rests upon you if you choose, despite your inferiority, to reach forth and grasp at these common human blessings. Society's only restriction upon you is that you shall not overflow and swamp the future with increasing numbers of persons below the standard of body, mind or heart."

A method like this for gradually improving the average grade of the human race will be slow in its action, showing but moderate results between one generation and the next. But unlike some laws suggested by the agitators of our day for refusing the right of marriage entirely to certain defective groups, it is worthy of our humanity because it is humane. And there are plenty of centuries coming, if only the trend be in the right direction. For the law of this progressive improvement in the general average is like compound interest, which amounts to but little in two or three years but piles up to amazing figures as time elapses.

Such a method, intelligently followed for five or ten centuries, would practically rid the race of such deficiencies of mind and body as can be ascribed to defects in the ancestry, and would

multiply the numbers of talented, wholesome and righteously happy individuals. And these ends it would accomplish without encouraging selfishness or cruelty on the part of the gifted majority. These ends it would accomplish without denying to the afflicted the right to all the happiness they can reasonably appropriate.

And remember also, these ends it would accomplish without imposing upon mankind an uninteresting uniformity. There would still be tall men and short men. There would still be white men and black men and yellow men. There would still be the beauty of red-headed blonds and of dark-eyed brunettes. There would still be musical geniuses without a bit of business sense, and fine business men who didn't play chess, and chess prodigies who didn't care for painting. The efforts of the race will not be to lessen the number of distinct types, whose presence alone it is that makes life interesting, but to develop fine specimens of each and every type, while making rare those imperfections and afflictions which even the victims thereof recognize as evils and would fain escape from.

We shall not protract this discussion to inquire who, in future centuries, will be so wise that they may be entrusted with dividing the youth of each generation into four or five or six classes on the basis of their hereditary endowments, in order that society may demand that they regulate the reproductive function accordingly. Nor need we be troubled over the question as to how, in a matter complicated by individual passions, society will find a way for enforcing its decrees. These difficulties are less formidable than they

appear. For compulsory enforcement of such decrees there are already devices known to science. But public sentiment is a force all powerful when unanimous and confirmed by age, as witness the elimination, by public sentiment, of sexual liberties between close relatives. And there will not be, nor indeed should be, any attempt to enforce by law the ideals herein set forth until individual sentiment has largely been educated to demand their observance.

For the youth of our own generation these momentous issues are matters of conscience only. But conscience is now sadly asleep with both the defective and the gifted. The appeal cannot be made too strong or be urged by too many voices.

The young married couple who know themselves to be clearly in the class of weaklings and back alley incompetents should have it drilled into them on every side that they are trespassing on ground where they have no right if they launch into the next generation more than one or two children at the most. And as for the young married couple of culture and ability, either with or without wealth, they should be awakened to see that socially speaking the war between racial progress and racial decline is unceasing from generation to generation. They must come to recognize that they are drafted for world service by a draft board higher than any established by man, and that they are slackers in the world's work if they purposely evade the responsibilities of parenthood—plural parenthood, such as is necessary to maintain and expand the world's population of the best bred.